Helpful Hints for Libraries Just Starting Out In MSC Partners

 *   You may want to start out with one or two cases of crates, see what the traffic is like, and maybe order more later. There are ten crates per case. Slap a your library label on each crate, but know that they will join the circulation pool and – while you should always have crates coming in and going out – they are on loan to all of us in the partnership.

 *   Always have a handful of crates on hand at your library. If you are running out, send a request to a hub for extras. I'm sure there's a scientific reason for it, but extra crates seem to wash up at hubs (in Missoula anyway) and we are always happy to send out extras. If you have a lot of extra crates piling up for some reason, please send them on to a hub: sometimes its feast or famine, though usually the circulation is steady.

 *   Bright yellow is the preferred crate color for those libraries that live in the bottom of a valley socked in by depressing inversions much of the winter. Just kidding.

 *   The ideal lid is corrugated plastic and fits the crate almost snug – to keep items safe and relatively out of view. Some libraries have made foam board lids, and some use cardboard – these work well also. Paper is not so good for crates that travel via bus – not durable for schlepping through bad weather or getting a courier's 32 oz of soda spilled on it.

 *   For crates traveling via bus, you'll want the lid to reflect the library hub at the end of the bus journey. For example, if you send out items destined for Hamilton, the lid should reflect that they are going to Missoula, because that's the end of their journey by bus. Then, when we open it up at the hub, under the lid it should be clear where items are going --- either they are bundled and tagged, or there's another kind of lid underneath that indicates the final destination. Bus station workers and drivers should not be confused at all about where a crate's headed. In the rare case when they are, crates go off to the wrong city.

 *   When bundling items for other libraries, the ideal tag is made with bold Sharpee and nicely wraps around the bundle with a rubber band. Some libraries slide in a kind of book mark pre-printed with the destination library hanging out the top: these work well also. Itty bitty torn corners of scratch paper taped onto items … or dark blue post-its with delicate writing in ball point pen … not so good. Think about how many hands will handle them, the factory-like atmosphere at the hubs, and what will make the system work the smoothest.

 *   By bundling and tagging items for each library properly, you will avoid having the folks at the hub needing to re-scan each item. You want to avoid this. Scanning should only need to be done at (a) the library of origin and (b) the library of final destination – not in between.

Libraries in the partnership are getting new lids made up for some of their crate traffic. If you're interested in rate quotes and info on who can make these, let Karl Olson at Missoula Public know. Something to consider about getting nice lids made up: some libraries might modify them according to their immediate needs – so if you printed up a lid for BPL, for example, another library might grab it, grab a marker, put a line through BPL, write HFL instead and send it on to Anaconda. The most recent example I have is a pre-printed lid where someone x'ed out "Missoula Public Library" then proceeded to write in big letters over it, "Missoula Public Library." So, you may want to consider not pre-printing the lids, designing them for the broadest possible use, or getting each library to agree to send them back to you without modifying them.